'Spaghetti Savages': the cinematic perversions of *Django Kill*

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Introduction: the 'Savage Western'

> …The world of the Italian western is that of an insecure environment of grotesqueness, abounding in almost surrealistic dimensions, in which violence reigns[1]
>
> The truth in stories always generates fear[2]

It is widely accepted that the 'Spaghetti Western', one of the most vivid genres in cinematic history, began with Sergio Leone's 1964 film *Per un pugno di dollari*/*A Fistful of Dollars*. Although *A Fistful of Dollars* was not the first Italian Western per se, it was the first to present a set of individual and distinctive traits for which Latino versions of the myths of the West would subsequently become known. In short, Leone's much imitated film served to introduce a sense of 'separate generic identity'[3] to the Italian Western The blank, amoral character of 'The Man With No Name', played by the American television actor Clint Eastwood, was something of a surprise initially but his cool manner under extreme provocation from all sides was an engaging and powerful attribute. The extreme close-ups of faces and objects, often held by the director for extended – and sometimes excruciating – periods of time, generated an awful tension. The barren and empty landscapes of the Spanish desert at Almeria where the film's exteriors were shot brought a Dali-esque surrealism to the look of the genre. The grandiose sweeping camera movements, the explosions of gunfire and mayhem and the evocative musical score (which established the film career of Ennio Morricone) have continued to captivate audiences ever since. Like most Italian genre films, *A Fistful of Dollars* was received by critics with a certain level of scepticism and indifference but the film – along with Leone's subsequent Westerns – is now hailed as a masterpiece of postmodern cinema.

A Fistful of Dollars, then, inaugurated the Italian Western proper. Leone transmuted the ingredients of the American Western 'to produce a distinctive vision at once hyper-realist and surreal'.[4] But it was arguably Sergio Corbucci's *Django* (1966) that extended this fascinating mixing of genre tropes, designs and narrative considerations into new dimensions. Described as the first 'Gothic Western'.[5] *Django* in its own way initiated a cycle of 'fusion westerns' by incorporating and mixing various elements from the fields of horror, thriller, political and documentary cinema in order to create an Italian Western that was more violent, more perverse and more savage than those that had preceded it. While *A Fistful of Dollars* became notorious for the violence of certain scenes, *Django* took these 'bizarre and gruesome'[6] aspects of the 'wild west' to a surreal and lurid dimension. In the same way that Sam Peckinpah's film *The Wild Bunch* (1969) seemed to push the choreography of violence to new limits, Italian Western directors thought nothing of introducing alienating effects such as flashbacks, ultra violent set-pieces and extremely elliptical editing techniques. Their novel approach has simultaneously been celebrated as a new form of genre practice and reviled for its 'surprising clumsiness'.[7]

The genre 'degenerates'

> In Italy…when you bring a script to a producer, the first question he asks is not "what is your film like" but "what *film* is your film like?[8]

The above much-quoted statement by Italian horror director Luigi Cozzi pokes fun at the manner in which Italian genre cinema is created. As the Spaghetti Western genre progressed numerous curios began to intermittently appear, one of which is the focus of this study. Giulio Questi's *Se Sei Vivo Spara* (*If You Live Shoot*, 1967) remains one of the most intriguing and bizarre exemplars of the Spaghetti Western genre. *Se Sei Vivo Spara* was widely known as *Django Kill* in English-speaking territories and I will refer to the film under this title for the remainder of this chapter. The *Django Kill* title was, of course, a pointed attempt by the film's English and American distributors to associate the film with Corbucci's *Django* and, by extension, the commercially popular Spaghetti Western genre itself. Like many Westerns, Spaghetti or otherwise, the film can be interpreted as an allegory and Questi has confirmed that much of *Django Kill*'s content is reflective of his personal experience of World War II when he served as a young partisan[9]. Fascinating though this is, I wish to focus on the material art of the film and its place within Italian genre history. In his survey of Italian genre films, Kim Newman describes *Django Kill* as 'the most outrageously Gothecised of the Spaghettis'.[10] It is worth examining the notion of the 'Gothecised Spaghetti', that is the Western that has been altered in some way to incorporate other cinema tropes, further. In doing so I will also inspect the way that the Spaghetti Western incorporated elements that were drawn from a wide range of Italy's other popular cinematic genres. Speaking as a fan of popular genre films in general, it is this introduction of other particular aspects of Italian pop cinema to the Western that ultimately fascinates me. *Django Kill* goes way beyond simply offering Gothic tableaux and perverse religiosity in the setting of certain of its scenes, although these aspects are in place. The film's director Giulio Questi (1924-2014) was a former journalist who had served as the assistant director on Federico Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* (1961). He was also a veteran of Italian *filone* cinema and he duly brought an inventive mix of genre tropes and devices to the Spaghetti Western. Questi's work was highly original and though it was at times difficult viewing, it was ultimately influential too. One could argue that *Django Kill* briefly alleviated the Italian Western's slide into cliché and decay.

Django Kill is centred around a seemingly typical 'Western' town. Known by the local Indians as the "unhappy place", it is the type of desolate location that is familiar to fans of Western films. The town is beset by two equally sadistic rival gangs, one of which is a group of American outlaws led by Oaks (Piero Lulli) while the other is made up of fascistic, leather-clad, homosexual bandits who are led by the rotund Mr. Sorrow (Roberto Camardiel). 'The Stranger' (Tomas Milian), or Django as we shall now call him, accompanied by two enigmatic, 'mystically inclined'[11] Indian sidekicks, arrives in this town looking to recover a cache of stolen gold. The gold was initially stolen by Oaks and Django and their respective gangs in a joint venture but Oaks' gang subsequently double-crossed Django and his men in order to secure a greater share for themselves. Pursuing his former partners, Django finds shelter in the "unhappy place" and he soon discovers that the locals possess increasingly ugly and sadistic characters. Templer (the saloon owner), Hagerman (an Alderman who keeps his wife a prisoner in their home) and Sorrow all hear about the gold and want it for themselves. The film plays out as these rival factions battle for the gold, the result of which is the almost total destruction of all involved. As with 'The Man With No Name' – the *pistolero* of Leone's films – Django's acquiescence

in the face of the many violent acts that he duly witnesses is troubling. He is another example of the selfish lone drifter acting alone for his own selfish and ambiguous reasons, a character Fridlund defines as part 'infiltrator hero' [12] and 'tragic mercenary'. [13] In one scene for example, Templer's son Evan (Ray Lovelock), neglected and abused by his parents, is taken away for ransom and gang-raped by Sorrow's leather-clad gang. The boy, naturally traumatised by the experience, subsequently commits suicide. Django is present during the incident – Sorrow, who has sensed Django's fearlessness and noticed his skill with a weapon, is trying to recruit him to his gang – but he is completely drunk and is unable to intervene or even protest at this monstrous act. The viewer is thus left ethically disordered by the "hero's" acquiescence. The rape, and the many other violent acts with which the film assaults the viewer, brings to mind the shocking content of other morally ambiguous *filone* films such as the Italian horror and cannibal films. Significantly, Django's initial interest in obtaining the gold stolen from him by Oaks quickly dissipates as the horrors of the narrative roll on and his desire for pure vengeance takes over.

Christopher Frayling described the brutal violence in *Django Kill* as being 'of an extraordinary savage kind'[14] and numerous scenes, which Questi himself admitted were 'outside the context of the common imaginary of the western'[15] were cut from the film by Italian censors. Frayling also notes, quoting Fornari, that it seemed ironic that the film was one of the few Spaghetti Westerns, because of this censorship, to receive cult status, or the 'stigma of artistic martyrdom'.[16] However, I wish to argue that *Django Kill* is more than the fortunate, sensational exploitation cash-in that this legend suggests.

A reflexive moment

The film's general weirdness, gore and sadism are heightened in a manner previously unseen in the Italian Western genre. Staig and Williams describe *Django Kill* as a 'masterpiece of surrealism',[17] which serves to place the film in close artistic proximity to Alejandro Jodorowsky's bizarre Mexican Western *El Topo* (1970). One of the fascinating dimensions of the Spaghetti Western is the way in which the certainties of the American Western are overturned. This happens in a startling and extreme way in *Django Kill.* For example, after Oaks' men double-cross Django and his gang of nefarious Mexicans and leave them all for dead (only Django survives) they enter the "unhappy place" to ostensibly overrun the town. However, they are soon beaten back and murdered by the townspeople. We see in the shots that show Oaks and his men entering the town just how sadistic, perverted and cruel the seemingly innocent townsfolk actually are. One man vomits outside a bar (we later discover that this is the town doctor); another places his foot on his child's head to keep it quiet; a woman bites her husband's hand, drawing blood, in a tussle. Seen through the windows of the houses and on the doorsteps of the same, these are disquieting snapshots from a ghastly vision of hell. Most of the outlaws, after being dispatched by the town's savage mob, are strung up in the central square (one is brutally shot in the head in plain view of the camera) while Oaks is pursued into a store by Django before being mortally wounded in the ensuing shootout. Oaks cannot believe that it is Django that he sees before him and he cries "you've come back from hell!" In the scene that follows, the townspeople discover during a crude operation to save him that Oaks has been penetrated by some of Django's golden bullets (which were specially fashioned for him by his Indian rescuers) and they literally rip him open in order to get at the precious metal that is lodged in his body. This scene was cut from the English

language version of the film, such was its gruesome and bloody content. The sequences discussed above offer clear evidence of the way that *Django Kill* transcends the usual boundaries of the Western genre.

Although Questi once observed 'I never liked Italian Westerns. I made one, and to tell the truth, I only like one; the one I did'[18] *Django Kill* does in part draw upon elements found in previous Italian Westerns. The settings (it was filmed in and around Madrid), the costumes, the music and cast of characters are clearly a continuation of recurring elements in what had become an immediately identifiable genre. *Django Kill* exemplifies the key dimensions of the Italian Western in the way that it privileges visual effects and sound/music over narrative and coherence. Both Staig and Williams (1975) and Frayling (2006) have noted the operatic violence of the Italian Western and the set-piece 'gundown' which leaps from the narrative of the films as a stand alone spectacular event, much like those key thrilling moments that are found in musical theatre. This method of filmmaking leads to a choreographic approach to the staging of action – a 'dance of death' – where the 'characters play out their roles in subservience to the soundtrack'.[19] The musical score is obviously a vital component in this. According to Staig and Williams, 'the opera requires the careful attention of both musical director and director for the movement, choreography or whatever. In the Italian Western the role of the film composer is exactly the same'.[20] While we certainly recognise this in the epics constructed out of the partnership forged between Sergio Leone and Ennio Morricone in the 'Dollars' trilogy and *C'era una volta il West/Once Upon a Time in The Wes*t (1968), it can also be found in the 'lesser' Spaghetti Westerns. An early scene in *Django Kill* illustrates this well.

As Oaks' gang slowly enter the "unhappy place", an eerie, low, pulsing musical phrase consisting of an electric organ playing a minor-chord drone, plucked electric guitar notes, strange xylophone sounds and bongos can be discerned. The music here is reminiscent not of the overblown drama of the 'wild west' but of the aural landscape of the psychological horror or *giallo* film. In one sense this is perhaps unsurprising, given the fact that the score of *Django Kill* was composed by Ivan Vandor who provided music for films as diverse as the mondo documentary *Nudi per vivere* (1964) and Michelangelo Antonioni's *The Passenger* (1975) whilst also working with Morricone in the experimental avant-garde group *Gruppo di Improvvisazione Nuova Consonanza*. This unconventional approach to scoring can be detected throughout the soundscape of *Django Kill*. For the hallucinogenic opening sequence, where Django comes back from the dead, the music is made up of disturbing and menacing, rising and wavering string chords that would be equally at home in a tense scene from a horror film or presented as part of a contemporary avant-garde composition. Later, after he has shot Oaks, Django washes himself in one of the town's troughs and the sinister imprisoned figure of Templer's wife appears at a barred window. Vander's music here is again strange and unnerving: string *glissandi* accompanied by vibraphone and guitar sounds that echo the ghostly presence of the woman. Incongruous music is present in several scenes from *Django Kill* and incongruous music is a notable feature of numerous Italian genre films. Indeed, a wholly disquieting effect is often created within these films by the jarring clash that is provoked by the disparities that exist between what we hear and what we see.

The 'amoral and shocking'[21] nature of this specific effect is present throughout *Django Kill*. When the Wells Fargo wagon carrying the gold is jointly hijacked by Django's and Oaks' men, sinister music plays on the soundtrack before being subsumed within a more familiar clomping and Spaghetti Western-like musical cue.

This effect occurs yet again when Django takes to his room at the hotel, the muddled soundscape reflecting, it seems, the psychological torment and confusion of his predicament as it unfolds before him (his obsession with washing his hands is expressed again here). Audio-visual disquiet also reflects the torment of Evan the young boy, most notably when he stumbles across his father and his mistress kissing in a passionate and erotically presented manner. Staig and Williams observe that the 'Italian Western's Operatic Vision manifests itself at moments of realisation and reckoning'.[22] Thus the Spaghetti Western's music and sound can be identified as being critical to this effect. The score for *Django Kill* represents the psychological discord of the characters and their location but the film does not just draw its inspiration from the Western genre alone. *Django Kill* is clearly reflexive in the manner in which it draws on the aesthetics of other Italian genre films.

Django Kill and the Italian genre film

The relationship between the Spaghetti Western and other genre pictures is key to an understanding of *Django Kill*'s peculiar and distinctive form, both 'inside' and 'outside' of the Spaghetti Western canon. I wish to go on to examine the links between the film and the 'mondo' documentary film, where post-production sound effects, 'shock' editing cuts and certain unusual camera perspectives were key ingredients; the Italian horror film (from wherein the 'Gothic' can be located), in which a heightened and baroque sense of spectacle holds sway and the eroticism, brutality and spectacle of the Italian *giallo* thriller, with which incidentally Questi first made his name.

The distinctive 'shock cut' of the mondo film was developed by a team led by journalist Gualtiero Jacopetti and marine scientist Franco Prosperi who found world-wide success with their first feature *Mondo Cane* (1962). This film is a 'Technicolor' documentary tour of the world's customs and rituals, jumping from Europe to the outer reaches of Australasia by way of the US and the Far East. Some critics in Italy – especially those of a Marxist bent – routinely dismissed Italian genre films because they perceived them to be part of a 'cinema of evasion'.[23] *Mondo Cane* was treated with suspicion by these very critics because they considered its original but sensational style, in terms of documentary cinema at least, was deceitful. Jacopetti and Prosperi had, however, planned the film to be that way from the outset. Jacopetti's technique was, he admitted, 'shock, from the beginning…Life is a continuous passage from one feeling to another…I believe these shock cuts are the only way to convey this process'.[24] In using film to convey the 'brusque passages'[25] of life, the mondo film legitimized the technique of extreme montage in Italian popular cinema and this bled into other genre films. Questi, in *Django Kill*, uses this 'shock' technique to convey various emotional states, such as the dark mindset of the eponymous anti-hero. For example, one of Django's traumatic flashbacks to the ambush and murder of his men by Oaks' gang appears as 'fragmented imagery involving a rapidly fast montage of visuals and sound'.[26] It is, in effect, a collage of jump cuts underscored by the sonic explosions of gunfire. Likewise, the joint hijacking of the Wells Fargo gold wagon is rendered in frames of just a few sharp seconds. Similarly, the climactic massacre by Django of Sorrow's troops, which is achieved by sending their leader's stolen horse packed with explosives into the returning group of bandits, is rendered in a series of shock frames. These shock frames also work to overcome the limitations of the film's budget by representing the large scale destruction of Sorrow's gang via only briefly glimpsed fragments of

explosions, bloody corpses, distorted body organs, abstract colour frames and dead horses. Django also, at the point following his attempted execution by Oaks, is seen rolling *up* a hill as the frame has been flipped 180 degrees along the horizontal axis in the editing process.

It is understandable that Anglo-Saxon viewers and critics found this approach puzzling at times. However, as Frayling notes, 'the film may be made up of entirely unforeseen obstacles of the most outlandish kind, but the viewer still recovers, over and over again, "what he already knows" '.[27] The confusion of the narrative is thus overcome by the viewer's understanding of the generic meanings that are attached to the various spectacles that are found throughout the film. Furthermore, in *Django Kill* 'the Django formula becomes the excuse for a surreal, brutal phantasmagoria, in which the plot stubbornly resists any categorisation'.[28]. The mondo film tradition of dispensing with a clear narrative framework and instead proceeding by association and collision can be found in many exemplars of the Italian Western, including *Django Kill*. Questi himself, with his background in editing (a background that he shared with his co-writer Franco Arcalli), described the film as 'a series of dramatic events which created tension…to set past events in the present action'.[29] The editing in *Django Kill* reflects the elliptical experiments of the time where the audience, in the words of critic Stephen Farber, is 'constantly thrust upon a scene before we have our bearings, forced to catch up with what is going on'[30]. This is cinema where 'the very rhythm of the film is that of an assault'[31]. Even the latter mondo tendency to fake scenes in film studios and incorporate dummies and models fabricated by the legendary special effects expert Carlo Rambaldi can be located in the most outlandish scenes of the Spaghetti Western (see the above mentioned golden bullet 'operation' episode and the scene where one of Django's Indian friends is scalped in *Django Kill*).[32]

Other elements of the mondo film, which can be identified in the Italian Western, include specific uses of music and sound effects. In *Django Kill*, as with other Italian Westerns, the instrumentation and the individual musical elements replaced the dialogue of the actors. The sounds here take 'the place of words and foreshadowed action'.[33] 'Wild West' themed music (strings and electric guitar, etc., re-workings of the music associated with American Westerns and so on) runs throughout most of the film, referring to a composite sonic memory of the entire history hitherto of the Italian Western. Interestingly, it appears that the kind of cross genre mixing and matching that I have alluded to in this chapter possessed a reciprocal, two-way flow within Italian popular cinema. For example, faint echoes of the Spaghetti Western can be found in *Goodbye Uncle Tom* (*Addio Zio Tom*, 1971), Jacopetti and Prosperi's docu-drama-cum-"Spaghetti Southern" about the American slave trade which represents a European fascination with the 'darkness and grotesque in a land of light and affirmation'.[34] This is not so surprising given that the historical South and the historical West have a number of iconographical aspects in common at a basic level (e.g. hats, horses, Southern Belle gowns and guns). But, perhaps more surprisingly, in Jacopetti and Prosperi's mondo film *Africa Addio* (1965), documentary scenes of a mercenary capture of the town of Boende in the former Belgian Congo, are accompanied by composer Riz Ortolani's mournful trumpet solo, which is reminiscent of Morricone's use of the same instrument in the Leone films. The mercenaries are portrayed as gun-toting 'Western' outlaws, who act only unto themselves and, like any 'Man With No Name', answer to no-one. Similarities also occur in the realm of post-production sound. Since all of the sound in Italian films from this era was dubbed in post-sync, Jacopetti and his team perfected the sound of

gunshots by using large drums which they fired weapons into. Ortolani told me in an interview in 2001 that Sergio Leone had been present at the post-production stage of *Africa Addio* and had taken the technique into his own Westerns ('Leone copied everything' Ortolani claimed[35]). The strange effect of the dubbing process extends to *Django Kill*'s music. When Lori, Templer's mistress, sings for Oaks' gang in the saloon, her eerie, echoing and lush 'jazz' inflected voice reverberates around the film's interior space, with no attempt made to match the ambience of the actual location.

The sexualised violence of the Italian *giallo* film and its tendency to be 'structured around elaborate set pieces'[36] can also be tracked in the Italian Western. As the *giallo* genre progressed and was refined, the same lack of interest in coherent narrative flow and believable scenarios was replaced by a 'series of stylishly gruesome murder and suspense sequences which are treated like production numbers in a musical'[37]. The act of murder in the *giallo* film becomes a spectacle surrounded by 'intricately beautiful décor, costuming and lighting'[38] . This tendency is located also in the sweep of the Italian Western and the baroque attention to detail found in the films' killings and slayings. When work on *Django Kill* began, Questi was already working with Arcalli on the film that would become *La Morte ha fatto l'ouvo*/*Death Laid an Egg* (1968), one of the more bizarre *giallo* offerings that in turn features some of the most extreme elliptical editing ever experienced within the *giallo* genre. Questi explained that he brought 'personal elements' into the generic narratives required by commercial film producers. As a partisan during the Second World War, Questi was part of band of 'thirty or so men' who witnessed 'terrible things'.[39] These desperate experiences formed the background to the 'imaginary western'[40] that became *Django Kill.* Indeed, Martin-Jones describes the film as 'a surreal expression of director Questi and editor Franco Arcalli's wartime encounter with fascism'[41]. One clear visual nod to the *giallo* film is when Evan, disturbed by the relationship between his father and Lori, whom he has just witnessed kissing passionately, creeps into Lori's room and attacks her clothes, slicing and hacking the black lace garments to shreds with his knife. This visual action is accompanied aurally by the sliding of hideous-sounding strings. The vivid colours of the setting, the room and the clothes, together with the music, resembles the kind of heightened scenario that is routinely associated with Italian thrillers. The tendency of the *giallo* film towards convoluted narratives and 'incoherence that might as well border on the fantastical'[42] is certainly found in the general narrative and atmosphere of *Django Kill*.

In addition, the already stated horror elements of *Django Kill* draw on the strong tradition of what Newman describes as the Italian '*orrore* film'[43]. Frayling notes the film's phantasmagorical nature and claims that the film 'owes more to Edgar Allan Poe and Roger Corman than to Bret Harte and John Ford'.[44] The opening scene of the film, where Django emerges from the grave that his would-be killers have dumped him in, begins with a dusty hand rising from the ghostly, crumbling earth. While this appears to be a nod to Bunuel's *Los Olvidados* (1950), it also serves to link *Django Kill* to the later Italian horror revival films that featured zombies, such as Lucio Fulci's *Zombi 2* (1980). When they hear Django struggling to rise from his grave, one of the Indians intones "It is the voice of the dead". And like one of the undead, Django lives on after his "death". At another point in the film Django is captured by Sorrow and is imprisoned in a filthy cell that is filled with reptiles and bats. The squeaks and cries of the bats that are introduced to torture Django are placed prominently on the soundtrack. The gloominess of this dreadful scenario also recalls the contemporaneous Italian Gothic horror aesthetic, as found in films such as Mario

Bava's *Black Sunday* (1960). Other moments contain further fragments of the horror aesthetic. A bizarre and unmotivated shot after the capture of the Wells Fargo gold wagon shows a corpse floating through the green water, blood misting around the body. Creepy music is heard playing over this disturbing image. Later, in a scene cut from the film by censors in English speaking territories, one of Django's Indians is sadistically scalped. As the knife cuts in, bright red blood drips from the hideous wound, down his face and into his open mouth. At the end of the film Hagerman's imprisoned wife Elisabeth, a character also, incidentally, 'straight out of the Gothic tradition'[45] deliberately sets Hagerman's house ablaze in an act of vengeance on her cruel husband. The heat from the flames eventually melts the gold that Hagerman has hidden there and as Hagerman desperately tries to rescue it from the fire, the now molten substance pours onto his head and, as he staggers around the house, kills him in an agonising and baroque manner that is recognisable from the great tradition of Italian horror cinema. The scene where Django discovers the murdered members of Oaks' gang strung up in the town square also dwells on the gore and violence of their murder (dripping blood, wounds from beatings, distorted corpses, mangled and twisted faces with distended tongues and so on). The hardened Django looks away from this disturbing spectacle in terror and shock while Evan stares at it (like the audience) open-mouthed.

Lucio Fulci defined this peculiar fragmented style as a form of plotless 'absolute film' where in horror films such as *The Beyond* (1981) we discover that 'there is no logic to it, just a succession of images'.[46] A further connection between the Italian western and horror genres can be found in Fulci's *Four of the Apocalypse* (*I quattro dell'apocalisse*) (1975) where the gratuitous violence of *Django* can be found mimicked in scenes featuring disembowelment, rape, ropes cutting into flesh, an occult psychedelic ritual and a male-only town with homosexual undercurrents. A bizarre sequence in the 'ghost town' of the story, filmed with a hidden camera, is also reminiscent of the mondo film aesthetic and the dream-like black-power massacre at the climax of *Addio Zio Tom*. Fulci himself described the film as 'a particularly odd film'[47], one of his 'most surreal western'.[48] Like Questi, Fulci portrays the West as 'a land of unremitting cruelty and hate'.[49] These 'detailed unpleasantries of death and torture'[50] are a distinguishing feature of both the Latin western and horror genres.

Conclusion

The free-wheeling approach to the art of Italian genre cinema, where genres frequently 'overlap'[51] allowed Questi to draw upon the far reaches of the psychological imagination as much as historical fact and he ultimately produced a personal vision of 'spaghetti excess'. Similarly, the Italian Western's preoccupations with the tropes of death are, in Questi's film, a striking extension of the Gothic imagination, a site where in place of careful exposition 'the story is progressed…through mood and atmosphere'.[52] Moreover, in *Django Kill* Questi deliberately 'explored the iconography and rituals of death: massacres, hangings with the condemned suspended upside-down, torture…'.[53] It can be seen that awful visions of World War II, a war that Questi fought in, made their way into *Django Kill*. The fascist 'muchachos' of Sorrow's gang 'served as metaphorical scenery for the present'[54]. The film reveals to us how in this narrative Django, in the words of his Indian companions, has "seen the land of the dead".

Thus, we have discussed how *Django Kill* – according to the recent Argent Films DVD cover 'the most brutally violent Spaghetti Western ever made'- is a film

fashioned out of a collection of sadistic and grisly set-pieces. The film's elliptical, even 'demented'[55] approach to editing, when coupled with the exaggerated acting style of the Italian cast and the post-production dubbing processes, results in a thoroughly bizarre viewing experience as far as Westerns go. Django's nightmarish dreams are rendered in a collision of vivid, hyper-real images and sounds that are innovatively edited together by Questi and Arcalli. At times, fragments of scenes are left swirling around the mind of the viewer resulting in an experience that is akin to watching an experimental art film. The art of the Italian *filone* can be recognised as a series of cycles within wholly derivative genres. *Django Kill* is a fine exemplar of a *filone* film but it also manages to transcend such pigeon holing. As Newman observes 'the best examples of most cycles are surprisingly sophisticated mixes of imitation, pastiche, parody, deconstruction, reinterpretation and operatic inflation'.[56] The uneveness of Italian genre cinema and the tensions between carnivalesque film styles cannot obscure what remain 'salient geopolitical concerns'[57].

The diverse and confusing nature of the elements that make up *Django Kill* may have led to the film being accused of bringing the Italian Western to a 'fever pitch of psychological weirdness'.[58] However, *Django Kill* remains an exemplary Italian genre film of the kind produced during what has been described as the country's 'golden age'.[59] The film moreover influenced subsequent genre filmmaking by the likes of Quentin Tarantino ("I saw him kill Bill!" is a phrase uttered by Lori after Templer has been murdered) and Alex Cox, whose *Straight to Hell* (1986) plays like a re-imagining of *Django Kill*'s main preoccupations. Questi refashioned the Spaghetti Western in the same way that he refashioned the *giallo* film with *La Morte ha fatto l'uovo*, his general work being to 'expand the vocabulary of cinema as a viable and organic part of an evolving cultural landscape'.[60] Questi's ultimate approach to the genre film forces viewers to 'spontaneously realign themselves to a cinematic experience'[61] and with *Django Kill* this was achieved with a clear level of cinematic assurance.

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